

The GREAT SACRIFICE



*The Tragedy of
an
Unwanted Bride*

Chapter 72

Apache Charley



COUNT HARCOURT seemed to be in a rare good humor when he returned from his visit to the prison. He felt like a man who has just discharged an unpleasant duty. He had granted Mignon Faraget's request, and in return he had received a smile he read as indicating that she would grant him any favor he cared to ask.

But his arrival at such an unwarranted conclusion showed only too plain how little he knew about women of Mignon's type and character.

At dinner that evening he drank more wine than usual. With the quick rise of his spirits came the imaginary realization that his long battle with the beautiful young French girl was won.

He felt sure that she would capitulate without question upon his next visit to her villa.

Later, as he sat in the library, complacently puffing at a cigar, he continued indulging in the most pleasant thoughts. But he was disturbed by the sudden entrance of his secretary, Ramong.

"What is it?" he inquired with some irritation.

"Major Barkley is here, Your Excellency," the secretary announced.

"What does he want?" with more irritation.

"I do not know, Your Excellency," Ramong answered. "But he says he is very anxious to see you."

Count Harcourt pondered a moment.

"Alright, send him in," he ordered.

The Governor of Algeria had an inkling why Major Barkley called on him at this time. A dark frown clouded his face. For the major was a close personal friend of Armand Duverne, his brother-in-law.

Presently the visitor was ushered in.

He was a tall man, slightly past middle age. He wore the uniform of a soldier of France. He saluted his superior officer.

"Ah, I am glad to see you, major," cried Count Harcourt, holding out his hand as he uttered this falsehood. "Do you know, I was just thinking about you. To what circumstance am I indebted for this pleasure?"

Major Barkley's clean shaven countenance was grave.

"I come as the representative of Monsieur Armand Duverne," he replied.

"Then you are his second, major?"

"Yes," admitted the visitor, standing very erect. "I hope Your Excellency will not take offense. I could not evade his request."

"Why, of course not," the other laughed. "That is perfectly alright. As a soldier and a man of honor you were obliged to act in the capacity of a second for him. The rules of every duel require that."

He paused for a second or two, then added: "By the way, how is my dear brother-in-law? Has he sufficiently recovered from his recent illness to be able to meet me on the field of honor?"

The major shook his head slowly.

"I am afraid not," he responded. "However, he says he feels strong enough to meet you. And he is anxious to have the matter disposed of. Are you ready, Your Excellency?"

"Always ready for such pastime as that," the Governor of Algeria declared pompously. "When is the

duel to take place?"

"To-morrow morning at five o'clock sharp."

"And the place, major?"

"The south end of Lafayette Park."

Count Harcourt hesitated a moment before he asked the next question. It was one of greater importance.

"What — what are the conditions?" he inquired at last.

"The conditions," Major Barkley replied, "Armand Duverne leaves to you since you are the injured party. It is your privilege to name the weapons. Which do you prefer, swords or pistols?"

"Oh, pistols, of course," the count retorted with a confident grin. "And an exchange of three shots at a distance of fifty feet. Be kind enough to inform Monsieur Duverne that I shall be at the south end of Lafayette Park promptly." He paused. "Let's see, the hour set for the duel is five o'clock to-morrow morning, is it not, Major Barkley?"

"That is the time," the latter said somewhat stiffly. "I shall appear to act for Armand Duverne. May I ask whom you have chosen as your second?"

"No one as yet," was the quick reply. "But my choice is the man who now fills the position of a private secretary. Monsieur Jacques Ramong is an officer in the reserve corps and thus qualified to act in the capacity of my second. I hope you have no objection, major."

Major Barkley had to fight his strong inclination to object.

But the grounds upon which he could base the objection were of an entirely personal nature. That he would be overruled by Count Harcourt, he knew.

Upon several occasions Jacques Ramong had given ample evidence that he was utterly unfit to occupy

the high post of private secretary to the Governor of Algeria.

Instead of being honest and above board, he was secretive and sneaky.

But in spite of the man's glaring faults, Count Harcourt retained him. That there was some hidden reason for this, Major Barkley had long suspected.

However, he could not resist saying:

"I will be frank enough to admit that Monsieur Ramong, in my estimation, is hardly fit to act in an affair of honor. But I suppose I shall have to submit to your choice."

Count Harcourt laughed boisterously.

"Why, my dear major," he cried, "you are doing Jacques Ramong an injustice. Although he wears civilian clothes, he is a soldier at heart. His honor has never been questioned within my hearing. I insist that he act as my second to-morrow."

Major Barkley bowed perfunctorily.

"Very well, Your Excellency," he acquiesced as gracefully as he could, "then I have nothing further to say. Until to-morrow, then."

With a stiff salute he turned about face and departed.

The moment he found himself alone, Count Harcourt broke into an unpleasant laugh. For perhaps a minute he stood there, staring out of the window, then he rang the bell.

His private secretary responded to the summons quickly enough.

"My dear Ramong," the Governor said, coming to the point at once, "I have chosen you to act as my second. Of course, you know that I am to meet my brother-in-law on the field of honor. Well, the hour is set. To-morrow morning promptly at five o'clock, we will go to Lafayette

Park and settle the quarrel."

The private secretary expressed his appreciation in a few words.

"Now let the servants bring us two bottles of our best wine," His Excellency, the Governor, went on jovially. "I want you to drink to my success. For I shall need all my skill and cunning to-morrow. Armand Duverne may prove a tough adversary."

"Ah, but you will beat him," Ramong said confidently. "You are the best shot in France."

"How did you know that we were to fight with pistols?" the count exclaimed.

Jacques Ramong blushed uncomfortably.

"Well, Your Excellency," he answered with an ingratiating grin, "I was in the adjoining room. Without really intending it, I happened to overhear a part of your conversation with Major Barkley."

While this constituted an admission that Ramong had been eavesdropping, Count Harcourt passed it up with a slight frown.

"Order the wine," was all His Excellency replied.

In a few minutes these two men were seated with two bottles of the best Bourgundy between them. Count Harcourt was again in a splendid mood. He drank freely and talked much.

He frowned darkly when a servant entered suddenly with the announcement that a rather suspicious looking man insisted upon seeing him.

"Who is he?" he demanded harshly.

"The man refuses to give his name, Your Excellency."

"What does he want?"

"I asked him that, Your Excellency, but all he would answer was that he must see you personally on a matter of great importance."

Count Harcourt was about to instruct the servant to send the visitor away. He was not in a mood to listen to the tale of a stranger. Too often they came to him with stories of fancied wrong.

"You better see him, Your Excellency," the private secretary spoke up. "He may be the bearer of an interesting message."

"Very well," the count addressed the servant. "Send the man in."

A little later the visitor was ushered into the room.

The man was dressed shabbily. His unshaven face made him look less clean than he really was. With an old cap crushed in his hand, he remained standing at the door.

Count Harcourt could not suppress an angry exclamation. How dared this utterly disreputable looking individual invade the governmental palace at such an hour?

A thing like this had never occurred before. His first impulse was to have the servants throw him out bodily.

Again the private secretary intervened.

"Examine him thoroughly, Your Excellency," he whispered. "If you send him away without a hearing, you may regret it."

The count nodded.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked, still angry. "Speak quickly. I have not much patience with men of your type."

The man at the door grinned impudently.

Before he began to talk he advanced further into the room, his furtive eyes becoming fastened on the glasses filled with wine. He whetted his dry lips.

"I have come to tell Your Excellency," he said in

a low, croaking voice, "that a certain prisoner has been allowed to escape. The man is an American. Perhaps you have heard of him. His name is Donald Whitney. For more reasons than one, it should be your desire to recapture him."

Count Harcourt was not prepared for this. What did the man mean? If the American had escaped from prison, it was up to Colonel Gautier to recapture him.

"I don't like the way you talk, and I don't like your attitude," he cried. "Why should it become my desire to go after an escaped prisoner, and especially this one? You better make yourself scarce before I have you locked up. Be gone at once."

The man did not move. For a moment he fumbled with his cap. Then he said:

"If you send me away like that you will live to regret it, Your Excellency. Please believe me, I have come here to render you a service. I am in possession of a secret that will be of tremendous interest to you."

"Is that so?" the Governor said in a mocking tone. "If that is the case, out with it. What do you know?"

"Before I tell you, you must grant me a favor," came back. "I will tell you everything on a certain condition."

The count sprang up.

"What? You dare demand conditions?"

"I do, Your Excellency," the other replied, unafraid of the Governor's sudden wrath. "And you will agree with me afterward that you have made a good bargain."

Once more Count Harcourt was persuaded by his secretary.

"At least make him a promise," Ramong whispered. "You don't have to keep it afterward."

"Alright," agreed the Governor. "Name your

condition.”

“You must give me a written pardon,” came back. “And this pardon must contain a clause forbidding prison officials or police to re-arrest me.”

Count Harcourt and Ramong stared at one another.

“Then you are also an escaped prisoner,” the latter remarked.

“Yes, I am,” the visitor admitted.

“What’s your name?” thundered the Governor.

“Oh, you have heard of me,” the man answered, grinning. “My name is Charles Walker. But I am better known as Apache Charley.”

Count Harcourt and his private secretary were both on their feet.

The latter swiftly opened the top drawer of the desk and clutched the revolver hidden there. And he would have fired had not his master prevented it.

There was no need going to that extreme now. Apache Charley was in their power.

“So you are Apache Charley,” said the count, walking up to the man and looking him over. “I received notice of your escape from prison. Apache Charley,” he repeated, “the most dangerous killer from the Montmartre.”

The criminal straightened up, assuming an injured air.

“Your Excellency, I have never killed a man without giving him a chance,” he declared. “And whenever it became necessary, it was in self-defense. Please believe me when I say that.”

The Governor uttered an incredulous laugh.

“I might just as well believe that Napoleon is still the Emperor of France,” he sneered. “Well, my man, you surely took an awful chance in coming here to-night.

Are you armed?"

Apache Charley turned every one of his pockets inside out.

"You see, I carry no weapon, Your Excellency," he said.

"That much the better, my friend," responded Count Harcourt. "I am ready to believe, however, that you came here with the intention of bringing me some important information — information of peculiar interest to me since it concerns the escape of the handsome young American.

"And I am frank to say that I do not blame you for wanting to sell this information for a price. My secretary here will write the pardon you ask. It will be unconditional with my signature attached to it. Will that satisfy you?"

"It will," returned Apache Charley. "But before I speak I want to read the pardon over. Will you order your secretary to write it at once?"

"You are a cautious scoundrel," laughed Count Harcourt, now dominated by curiosity. Then to his secretary: "Monsieur Ramong, do your share in helping me oblige this gentleman. You know where to find the official form for such purposes."

The Governor's secretary wasted no time. He filled out the printed form, then handed it to his superior to sign.

Without hesitation Count Harcourt affixed his signature. When he handed the pardon to Apache Charley, several paper bills went with it. The outlaw gave voice to his pleasant surprise in a manner characteristic of him.

"Not so many words, my friend," the Governor interrupted him. "I want you to give me that important information at once."

Apache Charley waited a moment before he spoke. First the paper containing the pardon and the money so generously given, had to find a secure resting place in his pocket.

"Well, it is just this, Your Excellency," he said then, "Donald Whitney, the handsome young American prisoner is at present the guest of Mademoiselle Mignon Faraget."



Chapter 73

BIRDS OF A FEATHER



THE THREATENING glint of temper had risen in Count Harcourt's eyes, but he managed to subdue a violent betrayal of it. After all, exasperating as it was, he had expected something like this. Every little detail in connection with his visit to the prison rushed into his mind. There could not be the least doubt that Mignon Faraget had fallen in love with the unusually handsome American prisoner.

He recalled the look of horror on her face as Donald Whitney was being fastened to the whipping post. She had pleaded for him as only a woman, suddenly crazed with love, can.

Of course, the girl had contrived to get this American prisoner free. And the method employed was not an unusual one.

Count Harcourt himself, upon several occasions, had used the same method. Money lavishly spent always brought success.

But the more he thought about the matter, the harder it became to control his anger. Then jealousy, fierce and ominous, rose above that.

If Mignon Faraget harbored the handsome young American in her villa, she had become untrue to him in thought, and perhaps also in deed. He had been replaced in her affection by another. This, he refused to believe.

"If I find that you have lied to me!" he hissed,

seizing Apache Charley by the throat, "I'll have you shot without further ceremony!"

"I have told the truth," the outlaw cried, trying to squirm out of the Governor's grasp. "I swear, Your Excellency, every word I spoke is as true as gospel. Please, let me go."

The Governor flung the scoundrel away from him with a motion of angry disgust.

"What I want to know is this," he shouted, "Did you see the American enter Mademoiselle Faraget's villa with your own eyes, or have you that information from hearsay?"

"I saw it with my own eyes," the other answered, gasping for breath.

"How did you happen to be there? and how——"

"With Your Excellency's permission, I will explain," Apache Charley broke in eagerly. "Last night as I passed through the underbrush along the road which leads to the prison, I saw a closed automobile coming. The lights were dimmed and the chauffeur drove very, very slowly.

"I smelled a rat at once. Some intrigue was afoot. When the car stopped, I kept hidden and watched. Before long a man came running. He was out of breath as he reached the spot where I lay flat on the ground. In the moonlight I recognized him at once. He was none other than Donald Whitney, the American prisoner.

"Of course," the outlaw went on, "I suspected at once that he had made his escape. As he went on, I followed him. Just as I surmised, the closed automobile was waiting for him.

"Without saying a word to the chauffeur, he jumped into the car. As it drove off, I managed to find a resting place on the frame which holds the spare tire in the rear. Thus I was carried along without either the

driver or the American knowing it.

"After quite a ride the automobile stopped in front of the villa occupied by Mademoiselle Mignon Paraget. The American entered at once, and through a window I saw her receive the man in the friendliest manner.

"I suppose," Apache Charley ended with an ugly grin, "when a beautiful woman like Mademoiselle Paraget allows an escaped convict to visit her at a late hour in the night, she must be more than merely interested in him. What I saw during the next thirty minutes leads me to believe that she is desperately in love with him."

Count Harcourt swore viciously. Wild with jealousy and rage, he reached for his revolver.

Turning to his private secretary, he cried:

"If I find that this man told me the truth, Mignon and that damned American must die. I'll kill them both this very night. By God, I'll show them that they can't be——"

"But Your Excellency," the secretary broke in respectfully, "you must not forget your plan for to-morrow at an early hour. Wouldn't it be better to think of that now? You will need a steady hand and a clear mind. Your very life may depend upon these."

The Governor of Algeria shook his head.

"I can not let this other matter rest until after that without taking quick action," he declared fiercely. "I would be worse than foolish. By to-morrow morning the American may have left Mignon's villa."

"No danger of that, Your Excellency," Apache Charley spoke up. "Young people in love with each other do not separate so quickly."

"That is my opinion," the secretary agreed. "There are several reasons why this escaped American prisoner is bound to remain at Mademoiselle's villa for

some time to come."

In the discussion which now followed the notorious Paris outlaw suddenly found himself treated like an equal by Count Harcourt and the latter's private secretary.

He displayed so much wit and cunning that his suggestions always found willing ears.

"My friend," said the count at length in a confidential tone as he addressed Apache Charley, "I feel inclined to give you a position in my official family."

The scoundrel gasped with expectation and joy.

"Your — Your Excellency!" he exclaimed, "I'd give my life for you. I'll serve you faithfully and well."

"I believe you will," the Governor replied thoughtfully while he studied Apache Charley for a moment. "And I need a man like you. Of course, you will have to change your manners. Suitable clothing will do much to remove all connections with the past."

Count Harcourt's decision so far as the outlaw was concerned, did not meet with any outburst of enthusiasm on the part of Jacques Ramong, the Governor's secretary.

He gave ample evidence that he disliked the idea.

And occasionally, as his furtive eyes met those of Apache Charley, they held an expression of fear. The outlaw appeared to be vastly amused. And not without reason. In this Jacques Ramong he had discovered an old acquaintance.

Yes, he became quite sure of it as he continued to scrutinize Ramong's clean shaven features.

There had been a time, not so long ago, when this same man went by another name. And he had worn a beard so black that he was taken for an Italian.

"I want you to take our friend upstairs and give him some different clothing," Count Harcourt's voice

came peremptorily. "Come, my dear Ramong, you seem to be in a trance."

"Yes, Your Excellency," the latter cried, springing up.

He made a motion to Apache Charley, who followed him from the room with alacrity.

As they reached the second floor and stood in the big hall, flanked on both sides by many doors, the outlaw seized Jacques Ramong by the arm and swung him around.

"What do you want?" demanded Jacques with sudden anger.

"Keep cool, my friend," the other warned. "You and I have met before, haven't we?"

"We have not!" came back most emphatically.

"Oh, yes we have," the other persisted, grinning.

"I tell you we haven't!" Ramong denied stubbornly. "And we must not stand here in the hall and argue. Come into this room with me and I'll fix you up with some decent clothes."

Apache Charley followed him, seeming somewhat in doubt.

He watched the man closely as he moved about in search of suitable wearing apparel. But the more he watched this Jacques Ramong, the more he became convinced that he was not mistaken.

He waited until he was fully dressed, then he turned to Count Harcourt's private secretary with these words:

"I wonder if you'd care to hear a little story, my friend. It is about a very pretty girl by the name of Jeanne Garnier. I met her at the prison of St. Pierre."

Jacques Ramong changed color. The other then paused but finally went on:

"She was sentenced to serve twenty years for

complicity in the murder of her rich uncle. She and I became quite good friends during our confinement at St Pierre. From what she told me I gathered that she was a victim of circumstances.

"The man who claimed to be in love with her committed the deed. It was a clear case of murder, robbery being the motive. The man——"

"I am not interested in your story," the secretary interrupted with increasing uneasiness. "Come. The Governor is waiting for us."

"Your master will have to wait a minute or two longer," Apache Charley persisted quietly. "About this—this Jeanne Garnier," he continued in a slow drawl—"she had some influential friends who had her case reopened."

"The man who really did the killing, was tricked into betraying himself. While the girl was freed, he received a life sentence."

"But he was a shrewd scoundrel. When I pay him this compliment, I speak from my experience with him. His master mind conceived a plan which made our escape comparatively easy. You know, my dear Ramong, when I heard your voice for the first time to-night, my mind drifted back to the days of St. Pierre."

"You haven't changed much, my friend, except in appearance." The speaker looked Jacques Ramong squarely in the eyes. "In your movements you still resemble a panther. Your face is the same, even without the whiskers. Now don't try to bluff it out."

"I've got your number. I can't help but wonder at your nerve," Apache Charley concluded. "And I wonder, too, whether Count Harcourt would still retain you as private secretary if he knew that you are an escaped convict like myself. I don't suppose you would like the idea of me telling him, would you?"

Jacques Ramong had wilted long before the other finished speaking. Apache Charley had recognized him.

"Alright," he growled. "You've got me. But you and I can't afford to quarrel. You will need me and I need you, as you will see in the near future. Why not work together? If we play our cards right we might become independently rich in a few years. The plucking here in Algeria is fine."

"Suits me," agreed Apache Charley, then the two criminals shook hands.

When they returned to Count Harcourt's private office they found him pacing the floor impatiently.

"We are ready, Your Excellency," the secretary announced.

Together the three men left the governmental palace. In a closed car they were driven to the garrison of Tunis. Count Harcourt at once sent for the officer in charge and make known the object of his visit.

"This matter must be kept secret, of course," he ended confidentially. "I want six trustworthy men."

Count Harcourt was given the help needed for the task at hand. And now they proceeded toward the villa occupied by Mignon Faraget. It was decided to enter without causing any excitement.

The American fugitive must be caught without Mignon Faraget becoming aware of it.

Apache Charley received the commission of picking the lock in the door through which they intended to gain entrance.

At first he met with no success. Count Harcourt, burning with fierce jealousy and constantly growing impatience, stood beside the outlaw and swore softly to himself.

"If we can only get in," he muttered. "I know every room in the villa. And I think I know where to la-

cate this damned Yankee."

Finally Apache Charley opened the door noiselessly. Like so many dark shadows Count Harcourt and his men entered. Not a single word was spoken, the only means of communication being the sign language.



Chapter 74

CAUGHT!



DONALD WHITNEY stood in the center of the room, his face ghastly white and trembling in every limb. He was stunned at the stupendous revelation which had come to him. Joan — his own beloved Joan had called him, and he was near enough to hear her pitiful voice. He wanted to answer her, but his voice would not respond.

"Donald — Donald!" again came the plaintive cry. "Oh, help me!"

This seemed to galvanize him into action. His mental forces, already keenly alert, swiftly removed physical sluggishness.

There was no time to ask himself questions as to why Joan was under the same roof with him. To be near her — to be reunited with her, was his first impulse.

"Joan — Joan!" he called. "Where are you?"

No answer came. He ran along the four walls, tapping here and there, frantically trying to attract her attention.

Again and again he called her name, his heart contracting sharply. His efforts were rewarded at last, but not in the manner he so anxiously expected.

Instead came a shrill scream, like that of one in mortal agony. Then a short commotion, and then the dull sound of someone falling to the floor.

Donald at once took it for granted that Joan had been overcome by a fainting spell, induced no doubt, by

hearing his voice.

He was quite sure of the direction from whence her cries for help had come. And now, as he quickly examined the wall, he discovered a hidden door. He turned the knob and found it locked.

With every ounce of his strength he endeavored to open it by force.

With the breath whistling through his clenched teeth, he worked like a madman. At last the door gave way. The crash sounded like a sharp thunderclap. Donald fell with it, then picked himself up.

"Joan — Joan!" he called once more.

The room was in darkness. With feverish haste his finger slid along the wall, trying to locate the customary push button. But there was none.

He would have given half of his wealth for a single match. He searched his pockets frantically and in vain. Then it occurred to him that in the absence of a push button the light is turned on at the socket of the globe.

With both of his hands raised, he felt for the chandelier or a globe suspended from the ceiling.

This time he was on the right track. An instant later the room sprang into brilliant light. And there, not more than three feet away from him, huddled in a corner, lay Joan.

"Joan — Joan, my God!" he gasped, about to throw himself upon the prostrate form.

A noise coming from another door deterred him only for a moment. He followed his natural inclination and hurried the girl to his bosom, calling her by every endearing term his love-hungry heart could suggest.

"Speak to me, darling!" he begged. "Oh, speak to me. It is I, Donald. Thank God, I have found you at last."

Donald remained utterly unaware that Mignon

Faraget had entered the room and she stood near the door, watching the scene with green eyes. She looked like a veritable demon in her furious jealousy.

"How very — very pretty!" she said in a mocking tone. "What a pretty love scene. It is a shame to intrude upon it!"

At the sound of her voice Donald relinquished Joan and quickly rose to his feet. It only required one glance to realize the frightful change in Mignon.

He hardly recognized her with those distorted features.

"Now I can understand why you repulsed me," he heard her say with a harsh laugh. "You love this girl whom you call Joan. What a fool I was to let her come here and hide. But she shall not have you, Donald Whitney. Rather than give you up to her, I'll kill you both!"

Donald realized swiftly that this love-crazed girl meant every word she uttered.

"You can kill me," he answered, desperate. "If it will bring you any degree of happiness you can snuff out my life. For only death can separate Joan and I."

His words had hardly left his lips, when Mignon lifted the hand which had remained hidden in the folds of her dress. In it she held a revolver, an automatic of the latest make.

"No, I am not going to kill you without giving you a chance," the love-crazed girl said, her white features convulsed with jealous emotion.

"What chance do you propose to give me?" inquired Donald stoically.

"You must leave that woman there," replied Mignon with a vicious nod toward the huddled figure on the floor. "She shall not have you. Leave me alone with her. Go!"

Whitney did not move. There was not the least

doubt in his mind as to what would happen to the helpless Joan if left alone with this jealous fiend.

With his arms folded across his breast he confronted Mignon, a cold smile twisting his lips.

"I propose to stay in this room until——"

"You better go if you value your life," the girl cut him short. "I'll count three. This will give you enough time to get out. One — two——" Before she could count three, a harsh voice came from the door.

"Don't shoot, Mignon," it said. "Let me take care of that fellow. I'll see to it that he won't trouble you again."

Donald turned quickly. But he showed neither surprise or fear when he beheld Count Harcourt standing there. And back of the latter appeared several soldiers with guns drawn.

That he would be re-arrested and returned to prison, he knew. It seemed that all the world had risen against him.

There was no pity in Mignon Faraget's gleaming eyes. The glance she gave him was one of malicious triumph.

Then came Count Harcourt's sudden command:

"Get that man. He is an escaped convict. Take him back to prison at once!"

The young American, fired with the determination to resist arrest, straightened up to his full height. They were not going to take him without a struggle.

Now that he had found his dearly beloved Joan, he could not bear the thought of being separated from her again.

But to wage a fight against such overwhelming odds was sheer madness. It only resulted in a brutal punishment which might have been avoided.

The Governor of Algeria stood by, grinning dia-

bolically as Donald was subdued by brutal force.

They bound his hands securely behind him, and then, as he leaned panting and helpless against the wall, one of the soldiers struck him on the mouth.

"Damn you!" the Yankee hissed defiantly. "I dare you to do that with my hands untied!"

"That's enough," Governor Harcourt interfered. "Take the man away and guard him closely. Don't give him another chance to escape. If he does, I'll have the entire six of you shot."

Donald's bloodshot eyes rested pityingly and longingly on the form huddled on the floor.

Ah, if he could only exchange a few words with Joan. But she did not move. And there was not the least indication that she would recover from her swoon during the next few seconds.

"Away with him!" the count shouted, incensed at the American's obvious reluctance to consent to being dragged from the room.

Further resistance availed Whitney nothing. With his head bowed he was forced to submit to the inevitable.

Surrounded by six soldiers, each one of them ready to shoot to kill at the least sign of intended flight, he realized his utter helplessness.

"And now, my dear Mignon," Count Harcourt said, turning to the latter. "I hope you will be kind enough to explain. How did this American come to be in the same room with her?" pointing to Joan's quiet figure, still on the floor.

But Mignon Faraget was not yet ready to answer. She dare not admit that she had freed Donald Whitney because she loved him. Count Harcourt would show her little mercy if he learned the true state of affairs.

"I want the truth!" he growled, advancing a step toward her. "Out with it!"

"Why, Felix, dear," the girl protested, flashing him one of her most seductive smiles. "I never heard you speak like that before. Of course, I'll tell you the truth. And I am so glad that you came. I needed you. I was just about to kill this escaped convict."

"Yes, so I noticed," he returned, looking at her suspiciously. "But how did he get here? Did you have a hand in procuring his freedom?"

"If" Mignon laughed. "How absurd, Felix. Why should I be interested in this American? Where in the world did you get that notion? Of course, I admit I felt sorry for him. But that was all."

Court Harcourt stared hard at the girl. The expression in her dark eyes was now one of injured innocence.

Her red lips were drooping at the corners and then began to quiver as a prelude to breaking into sobs. It was hard to resist this lovely creature in that mood.

"Felix," she spoke again, her voice soft with persuasion, "I hope you do not suspect me of harboring a disloyal thought. I love you only. You ought to know that by this time."

His anger began to disappear and with it went most of his suspicion.

It was quite possible, he argued with himself, that Apache Charley had been mistaken. Men of his type usually jump at conclusions.

"Mignon," he murmured, "if I have done you an injustice, I am sorry. But you ought to be able to tell me how the young American prisoner came into this room."

"That is just the thing I am not able to explain," she answered readily. "He must have entered the yard from the alley in the rear. And he surely had a good reason for wanting to be near her," indicating Joan. "I

heard him call her his sweetheart and beg her to speak to him as I came in.

"I was never more surprised in my life, Felix. This whole aggravation could have been avoided if you had not insisted upon me hiding that blond girl here. You'll have to take her away now. I don't want a repetition of what happened to night."

"It shall be done," he acquiesced. "But, please, keep her here another day or two until I decide what is to be done with her. You'll do that, won't you?"

She flashed him one of her most alluring smiles.

"You know I'd do anything for you, Felix," she purred. "Anything," she repeated.

And then she put her arms about his neck and kissed him.

Count Harcourt was one of those men who are apt to forget a good many things, and condone a good many things in a beautiful woman.

When she begged him to leave this room and join him in having a cup of tea, he followed her readily.

Jacques Ramong and Apache Charley, who had remained at a respectful distance during the argument between the count and Mignon, now came from their hiding place.

Apache Charley uttered a cry of surprise the moment he saw Joan.

"By God!" he gasped as he studied her pale features. "I know that girl. I and a pal of mine found her on the steps of a church in Paris."

"You — you did?" asked Count Harcourt's secretary.

"Yes, we did," replied the other. "We had everything planned and took her to the Black Horse Inn. Some fellow dressed like a sailor butted in and took her away from us. Gosh, who would have thought that I would

see her again in Algeria."

For a long moment the two scoundrels eyed one another. Then both grinned.

"I think I know who this sailor was," Ramong said, his voice toned down. "You know," he added mysteriously, "as the private secretary of the Governor of Algeria I come in touch with a good many people in every walk of life. I have an opportunity to meet Count Harcourt's most intimate friends and the members of his own family."

Apache Charley did not catch the drift of what was being said.

"Well, what about it?" he demanded. "You are not telling me a thing."

"No?" Count Harcourt's secretary was still grinning. "When the proper time comes I'll enlighten you, my dear friend. And I'll make this prediction: if we play our cards right, you and I will have enough money to live in comfort and ease during the rest of our lives."

Arm in arm these two men walked from the room. It was very late. In front of the villa still stood the Governor's closed car. Evidently the latter still lingered in Mignon Faraget's treacherous arms.



Chapter 75

THE DUEL



OWHERE in the world are the early morning hours more beautiful than in Algeria. The climate of this far off country is like that of sunny California. Flowers bloom the entire year. The trees never shed their foliage and the native birds never cease singing. And during the morning hours all nature seems at its best.

On this particular morning two men were walking slowly through Lafayette Park. One of them looked rather pale, like a man just arisen from a sick bed.

The other wore the uniform of a soldier of France. He walked erect, and with strides the other could barely measure.

The man, who so evidently not yet in the best of health, was Armand Duverne. His companion was Major Barkley. Both were waiting for the arrival of Count Harcourt and the latter's friends.

For promptly at the hour of five Duverne and his brother-in-law were to face each other in a duel to the death.

"I wish this matter could have been settled at some other time," Major Barkley was saying apprehensively. "You seem far from strong enough to give a good account of yourself, Armand."

"Please don't worry about me, my friend," the latter answered, his lips twisting into an ironical smile.

"But I am worried," the major insisted.

entirely too cool for you to be out. Your frail health will not permit such exposure. If you were to suffer a set-back, you might not recover."

Armand Duverne paused and put a hand on his friend's shoulder.

"I could not allow this matter to drag on without creating the impression that I am afraid to face Count Harcourt," he declared. "I am afraid he must have already formed such an opinion. Physically I am well able to give a good account of myself. I may seem a trifle unsteady, but once I feel the pistol in my hand, I'll have perfect control of myself."

Major Barkley took both of Armand's hands and held them for a little while.

"You must gain absolute control of yourself, my dear boy," he said. "That is imperative. You may rest assured that Count Harcourt comes with the firm intention of killing you. He is not the kind of a man to show you the least consideration."

"Why, I do not desire any," replied Duverne.

"I — I wish the quarrel between you two might have been settled in some other way and without bloodshed. It seems a shame to——" Major Barkley paused as the other broke in with some vehemence:

"No, it couldn't be done. Nor would I have it any other way. Count Harcourt's insulting treatment of my sister demands a satisfaction involving the shedding of blood. I shall kill him or he must kill me. Please do not say anything more about it. There is no other alternative."

Major Barkley pulled out his watch.

"Still fifteen minutes of five," he murmured nervously. "I hope the count and his second will be on time. I dread waiting. Ah. I believe they are coming now."

But the crunching sound of the gravel was caused

by a lone pedestrian. An elderly man, gray and very professional looking, approached.

"Who is that?" asked Armand in a whisper.

"That is the physician whom I engaged," responded the major. "I am sure either you or Count Harcourt will need him."

Armand Duverne's handsome face showed a weary smile.

He held out his hands as he was being introduced to the doctor. The latter appeared to be a kindly gentleman judging by his manner of speech and sympathetic eyes.

"I hope with all my heart that my services won't be needed," he said. "There ought to be a way for the two combatants to settle this quarrel amicably."

Major Barkley was just about to explain why this was out of the question when Count Harcourt, accompanied by his private secretary, hove in view.

Introductions were in order. Armand Duverne bowed coldly to Jacques Ramong. He already knew him. The physician murmured a few words as he shook hands with the count.

"Did you bring the pistols?" inquired Major Barkley of the latter.

"Here they are," the secretary spoke up, lifting a flat black case he carried.

"Are they identically alike, Monsieur Ramong?"

"Absolutely, Major Barkley," came back. "It is your privilege to examine them. Please do so at once."

While the other stood a few feet away, the major opened the case and looked the weapons over carefully. He seemed rather surprised when he noticed that both pistols were already loaded.

"Why was this done?" he inquired, turning to Count Harcourt.

"To save time," the count declared.

Once more Major Barkley examined the weapons. So far as he was able to ascertain, everything was as it should be. But to make sure, he took it upon himself to hand out the pistols.

"Alright, gentlemen," he said then. "Please take your positions."

He walked away, a distance of fifty feet. Armand Duverne followed him. Not a word was spoken. Returning alone, he showed Count Harcourt where to stand.

"Now, gentlemen," he spoke again, "before we proceed further, it becomes my duty to give you an opportunity to settle your quarrel without bloodshed. Therefore I ask you if you are willing to submit to friendly arbitration. The very fact that you are close relatives ought to make a difference.

"Your wife, Count Harcourt, is Monsieur Duverne's sister. No matter which way this affair terminates, she is bound to suffer. I am sure she would not like to see her husband or her brother killed in a duel. Won't you consider? It is my wish that you become reconciled."

Armand Duverne remained silent. He bowed slightly. This was an indication that he was open to a friendly argument.

But not so Count Harcourt.

"Why waste time?" he shouted angrily. "I insist that we proceed in the manner agreed upon. Nothing will satisfy me except blood."

"I am sorry," said Major Barkley.

For a moment he looked at Armand Duverne. The latter stood there, pale, but determined. He seemed unusually handsome. While his features were pale, his eyes were bright.

Continued in next number

